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*Chapter 7*

**THE VULGAR EUPHEMISM (VE) SCALE:  
ENTITLED INCIVILITY IN  
SOCIAL RELATIONS**

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**ABSTRACT**

Seven studies measure and test a commonly recognized but unexamined psychosocial construct: asshole (or vulgar euphemism, VE). The VE is argued to be an ineludible part of human existence that cannot be ignored but can be measured and understood. The VE is posited to be someone who feels entitled to treat others in an uncivil manner. In Study 1, factor analytic results provide an inter-correlated four dimensional solution: social arrogance, disrespect, self-enthronement, and insensitivity. Confirmatory factor analyses support the four factor solution. In Study 2, the content validity of the VE scale is established; a paragraph of a person based on the factor analyses results elicited the VE term more than any other when respondents are asked the type of person the paragraph describes. In Study 3, the scale's nomological validity is examined. An inverse relationship is found between VE scores and the need for positive interaction with others, socially desirable presentation,

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and self-esteem. A direct relationship is seen between VE scores and measures of entitlement. Four studies then test the discriminative and predictive validity of the VE relative to the Dark Triad of personality traits (narcissism, Machiavellianism and psychopathy). In Study 4, the VE is found to be inadequately explained by the Dark Triad using latent modeling. In Studies 5-7, the VE adds significantly to predicting outcomes when controlling for the Dark Triad: Study 5, the agreeableness factor of the Big Five; Study 6, anger; Study 7, counterproductive work behaviors across six different dimensions. It is argued that the VE is an identifiable personality disorder that has unique value in understanding social and interpersonal problems.

Incivility is generally defined as rude, discourteous, or ill-mannered speech and behavior. Entitlement is a feeling of being privileged and special, or having the right to do something. The idea that some people feel entitled to treat others in an uncivil manner might seem surprising at first glance. We contend, however, that there exists a psychological trait, typically used descriptively in reference to a person, which fits this characterization but has yet to be theoretically and empirically examined.

Behaving in a civil manner requires respectful consideration of other people when making decisions about what to say or what to do in a social interaction. Those who are the targets of uncivil behavior frequently experience strong negative and personal reactions. One common method of dealing with such behavior is to assign a "label" to the uncivil person that not only categorizes the offender but may also help explain what just occurred. Vulgarities are among the terms commonly assigned to people who are uncivil, although their very use may not be civil in itself.

## **THE VULGAR EUPHEMISM**

Vulgarities are used as a means of expressing anger and hostility, and more generally serve as descriptions of feelings and states of mind (Jay, 1992; Barnes, 1980; Nichols, 1981). They have not yet been the focus of theoretically based empirical research arguably because they are offensive, possess diffuse meanings, and are thought to lack substantive and scholarly value. This research will argue that one particular vulgarity, although offensive, has transcended other limitations and has evolved over the last seventy years such that its usage now refers to a personality characteristic commonly recognized and understood, at least in North America. That

vulgarity is “asshole.” To avoid distraction from the intent of this research, and because the term is emotionally and culturally charged, we will generally use the acronym VE (vulgar euphemism) to refer to the construct being investigated, the scale being developed, and to persons thought to possess the corresponding characteristics.

Nunberg (2012) notes that contemporary use of the VE term can be traced to World War II but experienced a significant and continual increase around 1970. It is in general use today. We suggest that the cultural acceptance of this vulgarity reflects a common agreement about what it means and the unavailability of any other term which succinctly summarizes that meaning.

So, what exactly does the term “asshole” indicate—when labeling a human being, or at least when referring to certain behaviors? Despite our contention that a consensus has developed within the North American population, dictionaries provide definitions different from what we found over the course of our investigations (also see Nunberg, 2012). The Oxford College dictionary defines a VE as an “irritating or contemptible person.” Random House and American Heritage have similar definitions but the former substitutes “mean” and the latter substitutes “detestable” for irritating. Green’s Dictionary of Slang defines a VE as “a general negative description, unpleasant, worthless, obnoxious.” Longman’s dictionary defines a VE as “someone you think is stupid and annoying.” We believe these definitions inadequately convey the meaning of the term and how it is most commonly used.

## THEORETICAL DISTINCTIONS

Given the lack of previous empirical research in this area (there is none), we conducted extensive qualitative testing and combined those data with the limited literature in the area to develop an understanding of the VE. On that basis, we posit that the VE is someone who behaves in an uncivil manner when interacting with others because they believe they are entitled to do so. Those feelings of entitlement provide immunity from criticism by others (James, 2012).

We define the VE as entirely an inter-relational disorder. It is an interpersonal complex that orients individuals to treat others poorly. The behaviors of the VE likely account for the nature of the insulting and offensive vulgarity assigned to them. VE’s are those who do things to “us,” or at least to

persons we care about, and society retaliated by labeling the group with a term as repugnant as possible.

The development of the VE scale presented here focuses exclusively on behaviors reflecting feelings of entitlement to treat others in an uncivil manner. The VE's perceived right to treat others in an uncivil manner is often expressed with explicit self-justifications. For example, civil individuals do not presume a right to insult or disrespect others, but the VE does when they think someone deserves it, or "has it coming." A VE would not cut in line as a matter of course. They would only do so if they believed they had something important to do, and would not see that they are placing the importance of their activities above those of the people ahead of them in line. The same reasoning applies to interrupting someone in conversation.

The entitled incivility of a VE can also be implicit within certain behaviors. If someone deliberately offends another there is an implicit assumption of the right to do so. The same can be said of someone's stated need to overlook the feelings and interests of another. Whether explicit or implicit, the perceived right to be uncivil provides immunity from criticism by others. The VE is often unaware of how they appear to others and sometimes proud of it when they are (Sutton, 2007).

It should be clear why the VE makes people angry. They put themselves above us. They see themselves as standing outside the rules of conduct with which everyone else is expected to comply (James, 2012). Their arrogance, disrespect and insensitivity, coupled with their perceived right to critique the actions and outcomes of others, makes them highly distressing to many people. However, we will demonstrate (in Study 6a) that there are dangers associated with allowing a VE to anger us.

## **THE VE AND THE DARK TRIAD**

The purpose of this paper is to focus on the hypothesized meaning and consequences of the VE as a psychosocial construct. Three studies develop and provide initial validation of the VE scale. Four studies are then conducted comparing the VE to the Dark Triad, which currently dominates research and discussion of personality disorders (Furnham, Richards, and Paulhus, 2013). Paulhus and Williams (2002) contend that there are three types of "bad characters" in human beings: narcissists, Machiavellians, and psychopaths (also see Furnham et al., 2013). We will argue that the VE could be considered a fourth "bad character." The VE is expected and found to be related to the

Dark Triad of traits but also to have unique value in understanding interpersonal and social problems.

Narcissism is often defined in terms of grandiosity, entitlement, dominance and superiority (Corry, Merritt, Mrug, and Pamp, 2008). Narcissists engage in a continual quest for ego enhancement, crave admiration, are selfish (Campbell et al., 2005), and often hypersensitive to criticism (Thomas, 2012). Machiavellianism is a personality type that is cynical, unprincipled, and manipulative of others for personal gain (Jones and Paulhus, 2014). They tend to be cunning impression managers (Rauthmann and Kolar, 2012), and place importance on maintaining a positive reputation with others (Fehr, Samson, and Paulhus, 1992). Psychopathy is characterized by impulsivity, thrill seeking, and low levels of empathy or conscience when dealing with others (Furnham et al., 2013). Psychopaths are arrogant and deceitful individuals who do not see the need to conform to the rules of society (Gustafson and Ritzer, 1995). Their behavior is markedly irresponsible and often antisocial (LeBreton, Binning, and Adorno, 2006).

The Dark Triad has been linked to a wide array of problems, including aggression (Jonason and Webster, 2010), antisocial and criminal behavior (Douglas, Vincent, and Eden, 2006), violence (Hart, 1988), selfish short term mating strategies (Jonason, Luevano, and Adams, 2012), lying (Baughman, Jonason, Vernon, and Lyons, 2014), prejudice (Hodson, Hogg, and MacInnis, 2009), counterproductive work behaviors (Spain, Harms, and LeBreton, 2013), and the exploitive use of social influence tactics (Jonason and Webster, 2012).

The Dark Triad is clearly a broad encompassing constellation of maladaptive affective, cognitive, and behavioral traits (Paulhus and Williams, 2002). We suspect, however, that given the comprehensiveness of Dark Triad traits, it might fail in explaining common interpersonal and social problems as effectively as a measure of entitled incivility. The VE is exclusively defined in terms of such entitlement and distinguishes itself from the Dark Triad on that basis. It is not necessary for someone to feel entitled to treat others in an uncivil manner to be narcissistic, Machiavellian, or psychopathic. Further, if one does feel entitled to be uncivil towards others, that feeling, as well as acting on it, is not sufficient grounds to be classified as a narcissist, Machiavellian, or psychopath. However, it is both necessary and sufficient to be classified as a VE if one feels entitled to treat others in an uncivil manner—and no other psychosocial attributes are required. We contend that the differences between the Dark Triad and the VE are not minor and we offer extensive empirical evidence to support that position.

## THEORETICAL EXPECTATIONS

Given the differences noted above, we hypothesize that the VE is a construct that can be modeled as theoretically distinct from the Dark Triad. In addition, we hypothesize that the VE should contribute to the prediction of interpersonal and social problems beyond what is accounted for by the Dark Triad. This is because the VE is theorized here as entirely an inter-relational disorder whereas the Dark Triad, as a whole, is comprised of traits that encompass a wide range of problem issues. For example, “the agreeableness” factor of the Big Five personality model is measured with items that reflect relationships with others and we would expect the VE to contribute to the prediction of that factor beyond the explanation provided by the Dark Triad. We further contend that anger plays a greater role in the incivility of the VE (James, 2012; Nunberg, 2012) than the Dark Triad. We theorize that VEs are, at some level, angry individuals, and that anger often underlies many of their social and interpersonal behaviors. Although the same might be suggested about the Dark Triad (Hall, Benning, and Patrick, 2004; Raskin and Hall, 1979), we contend that VEs perceive their anger as a means of entitling their incivility and hence that emotion pervades their behavior more strongly. Finally, given the nature of entitled incivility, one would expect the VE to be involved in a variety of work related problems, and to uniquely predict those problems beyond the explanation provided by the Dark Triad of traits.

One reason the measurement of the VE has merit is because persons with that trait are an ineludible fact of life. As later shown, almost everyone has either called or thought someone to be a VE and there appears to be little hesitation in using the VE term when someone believes it is indicated. The VE is part of our cultural fabric and psychosocial existence and as such needs to be theoretically understood. Another reason for scale development are the consequences of interacting with a VE (James, 2012; Nunberg 2012; Sutton, 2007). We will demonstrate that the VE scale is a useful means of understanding interpersonal, social and organizational problems. The VE’s value in predicting and explaining outcomes that have historically focused on the Dark Triad will provide support for its utility as a construct of theoretical and practical significance.

Studies 1a and 1b develop a scale to measure the VE construct and confirm its factor structure. Study 2 examines the content validity of the VE scale. Study 3 examines nomological relationships with the VE scale. Studies 4-7 differentiate the VE from the Dark Triad using a predictive validity approach.

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## PARTICIPANT CHARACTERISTICS

The participants in these studies were all recruited from either online panels or universities. The decision was made not to include demographic breakdowns for individual studies (which total seven, or nine, if you include sub-studies). There were several reasons for this decision. First, the demographic data were mostly repetitive. The gender split was fairly equivalent for online samples, with men outnumbering females. For university samples, females greatly outnumbered males. Respondents were most often single for both online and university groups. University groups were always young but online respondents always comprised a broad age range. Another reason for omitting demographic data for individual studies is that many respondents chose to partially answer those questions, leaving readers with numbers on respondent demographics that mismatched those for the critical data. Finally, and importantly, the VE scale scores often significantly varied by demographics. Given that fact, it appeared best to present those analyses in aggregated form ( $N = 1857$ ) at the end of the paper (see Supplemental Analyses).

## STUDY 1A

### Method

#### *Item Generation*

Item generation was performed by reviewing literature on the topic (Nunberg, 2012; James, 2012; Sutton, 2007) and surveying people as to their experiences with someone who fit the label of a VE, consistent with a grounded approach to theoretical development (Charmaz, 2008). Participants ( $N=304$ ) were graduate and undergraduate students (volunteers) at a major southwestern university, as well as respondents from an online survey panel (Mechanical Turk, which was the panel, always compensated, used across studies reported here). They were first asked if they ever called or thought of someone as a VE. If they had, they were asked to describe in detail an encounter with a person to whom they assigned the VE label: "What happened that caused that term to come to mind." Only two persons (0.7%) stated they had never called or thought of someone as a VE. Following the survey, interviews were conducted with  $n=43$  of the participants. These interviews

were conducted to clarify comments those respondents made regarding their VE experiences and perceptions.

The data collected were converted into 40 scale relevant items reflecting uncivil behaviors and entitlement to engage in those behaviors. University students ( $N=123$ ) judged each item (yes versus no) as to whether it represented a perceived entitlement, or justification, to behave in an uncivil manner towards others. All (100%) or most (minimum 52%) judges answered “yes” on 22 items. Those items, scored on five- point scales from strongly agree to strongly disagree, were then tested for their dimensional structure.

### ***Respondents***

Participants ( $N = 495$ ) were from an online panel. They were told the VE scale was a personality/self-concept study. Item means and standard deviations for Study 1a are provided in Table 1.

**Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations**  
<sup>1</sup>( $N=495$ )

	Mean	Std. Dev.
When dealing with people, being rude can be helpful when I need to get a point across.	2.64	1.15
It is OK to insult people if I think they deserve it.	2.41	1.14
Quite frankly, if people sometimes find me irritating that's too bad about them.	3.01	1.11
I can be insensitive to the needs of others.	2.79	1.14
At times I take pleasure in being difficult to get along with.	2.04	1.12
Being arrogant is justified if I have the record to back it up.	2.22	1.10
I have a right to be disrespectful to someone who has it coming.	2.62	1.20
Being impolite has never had advantages for me.*	2.57	1.19
There is nothing wrong with me feeling superior to others if it's true.	2.62	1.19
I believe that a man (or a woman) has to do what a man (or a woman) has to do. Period.	3.09	1.11
I'll interrupt someone talking to me if I have something more important to say.	2.53	1.12
It's OK for me to cut in line if I am short of time and I have something important to do.	1.62	0.82
I often need to overlook the feelings and interests of others.	2.27	1.03
Being "mean" is not nice but it can be effective in getting what I want.	2.68	1.18
I always think about others before I act.*	2.40	1.00
Bossing people around can be fun for me.	2.11	1.04

	Mean	Std. Dev.
I never deliberately offend someone.*	2.56	1.18
Looking out for myself requires me to step on the toes of others.	2.37	1.03
I can be disagreeable – and if there is a reason for it I honestly don't care.	2.66	1.21
I've earned the right to distinction and prestige in life and I am not afraid to admit it.	2.29	1.07
When I cut people off in traffic, they often deserve it.	2.15	1.06
"Do you know who I am?" is a question I have been tempted to ask when talking to "certain" people.	1.64	0.94

<sup>1</sup> All items, except those starred, coded so that 1 = strongly disagree, 5= strongly agree. For starred items, 1=strongly agree, 5= strongly disagree

## Results and Discussion

A common factor analysis (principal axis) was performed. Since the factors were expected to be correlated, an oblique rotation (promax) was performed. A four factor solution (using the eigenvalue greater than one criterion) was obtained and accounted for 53.7% of the variance. A conservative approach for a sample size of  $N=495$  was taken in which only pattern loadings greater than .30 were interpreted (Hair, Ringle, and Sarstedt, 2011). The rotated sums of square loadings for the four factors respectively were 6.16, 6.03, 5.16 and 4.77, indicating that after rotation the amount of variance explained by those factors was fairly equivalent. Communalities ( $M = .44$ ) and the factor loadings are provided in Table 2. A fairly clean factor solution is seen with only two split factor items.

Factor 1 was labeled Social Arrogance, and contains high loadings on social egoism (“Being arrogant is justified if I have the record to back it up”; “There is nothing wrong with me feeling superior to others if it’s true”; “I’ve earned the right to distinction and prestige in life and I’m not afraid to admit it”; “ ‘Do you know who I am?’ is a question I’ve been tempted to ask when talking to ‘certain’ people”) and privileged behaviors (“At times I take pleasure in being difficult to get along with”; “It’s OK for me to cut in line if I am short of time and have something important to do”; “Bossing people around can be fun for me”; “Looking out for myself requires me to step on the toes of others”; “When I cut people off in traffic, they often deserve it”) in interpersonal relations. The items comprising this factor are reliable ( $\alpha = .85$ ).

**Table 2. Pattern Matrix Loadings  
(N=495)**

	Commonalities	Social Arrogance	Disrespect	Self- Enthronement	Insensitivity
At times I take pleasure in being difficult to get along with.	.35	.37			
Being arrogant is justified if I have the record to back it up.	.45	.41	.31		
There is nothing wrong with me feeling superior to others if it's true.	.43	.36			
It's OK for me to cut in line if I am short of time and I have something important to do.	.53	.89			
Bossing people around can be fun for me.	.39	.56			
Looking out for myself requires me to step on the toes of others.	.50	.44			
I've earned the right to distinction and prestige in life and I am not afraid to admit it.	.52	.63			
When I cut people off in traffic, they often deserve it.	.29	.52			
"Do you know who I am?" is a question I have been tempted to ask when talking to "certain" people.	.43	.78			
When dealing with people, being rude can be helpful when I need to get a point across.	.48		.52		

	Commonalities	Social Arrogance	Disrespect	Self- Enthronement	Insensitivity
It is OK to insult people if I think they deserve it.	.58		.75		
I have a right to be disrespectful to someone who has it coming.	.63		.80		
Being impolite has never had advantages for me*.	.34		.58		
Being "mean" is not nice but it can be effective in getting what I want.	.49		.43		
I never deliberately offend someone*.	.39		.58		.31
Quite frankly, if people sometimes find me irritating that's too bad about them.	.38			.56	
I believe that a man (or a woman) has to do what a man (or a woman) has to do. Period.	.44			.81	
I'll interrupt someone talking to me if I have something more important to say.	.26			.36	
I can be disagreeable – and if there is a reason for it I honestly don't care.	.48			.47	
I often need to overlook the feelings and interests of others.	.42				.33
I always think about others before I act.*	.31				.58
I can be insensitive to the needs of others.	.50				.75

\*Reserved scored; for all items, higher scores indicate greater VE attribute possession

The second factor is labeled Disrespect. The items comprising this factor reflect the perceived right to be disrespectful towards or disregard the rights of other individuals (“When dealing with people, being rude can be helpful when I need to get a point across”; “I have a right to be disrespectful to someone who has it coming”; “Being impolite has never had advantages for me”; “Being ‘mean’ is not nice but it can be effective in getting what I want”; “I never deliberately offend someone”). The split factor arrogance item (“Being arrogant is justified if I have the record to back it up”) suggests the mind-set that accompanies feelings of entitled disrespect. The items comprising this factor are reliable ( $\alpha = .84$ ).

Factor 3 is labeled Self-Enthronement, or placing oneself in a position of power or authority relative to others. This dimension reflects the belief that it takes courage to do certain things, but they still need to be done (“A man/woman has to do what a man/woman has to do. Period”) even if they cause others distress (“Quite frankly, if people sometimes find me irritating, that’s too bad about them”; “I can be disagreeable—and if there is a reason for it I honestly don’t care”) or otherwise requires mistreating them (“I’ll interrupt someone talking to me if I have something more important to say”). The reliability coefficient for this dimension is  $\alpha = .67$ .

The fourth and final factor loads on items reflecting Insensitivity to others. The high loadings on this factor include the split factor offensiveness item (“I never deliberately offend someone”) and three others that measure insensitivity (“I often need to overlook the feelings and interests of others”; “I always think about others before I act”; “I can be insensitive to the needs of others”). The reliability coefficient for this dimension is also  $\alpha = .67$ .

The inter-factor correlations are provided in Table 3. As seen, the correlations are moderate in size. The average correlation is .64. The reliability of the 22 VE scale items is high ( $\alpha = .91$ ). One question, however, is whether the four factor solution is stable (verifiable) or does a more parsimonious structure provide a better fit to the data. Confirmatory factor analyses were used to answer this question.

**Table 3. Factor Correlation Matrix**

Factor	Social Arrogance	Disrespect	Self-Enthronement	Insensitivity
Social Arrogance	1.000			
Disrespect	.656	1.000		
Self-Enthronement	.684	.655	1.000	
Insensitivity	.600	.684	.532	1.000

## STUDY 1B

### Method

VE data for  $N = 1756$  university and online respondents across the studies reported here, with the exception of Study 1a, were used in the analyses. Confirmatory factor analyses of those data tested the solution obtained in Study 1a. We tested whether the four factor solution obtained in Study 1a fit the data better than one, two and three factor models. The two and three factor models were developed by combining items for the factors shown in Table 2.

### Results and Discussion

Incrementally better fit was obtained for the one through the four factor models. The four factor solution,  $X^2(201) = 1513.79$ ,  $p < .0001$ , was found to fit significantly better than any of the more parsimonious alternative models, including the best fitting three factor model,  $X^2(206) = 1641.02$ ,  $p < .0001$ ; where the improvement in fit is  $X^2(5) = 127.23$ ,  $p < .0001$ . For the four factor model, standard indices of model fit range from moderate to excellent (RMSEA = .061; SRMR = .043; CFI = .913; TLI = .900) (Browne and Cudeck, 1993; Hu and Bentler, 1999). Our conclusion is that the four factor model obtained in Study 1a is the best fitting model when compared to more parsimonious alternatives.

## STUDY 2

Although literature on, and encounters with, VEs were used in deriving the items comprising the VE scale, that does not necessarily mean the VE term would typically be used in describing someone with traits to which the scale items refer. The second study examined whether a description of someone based on the factor analytic results would elicit the VE term. In other words, if the Study 1 results are valid, a respondent reading a description of someone based on those factor analytic findings should use the VE term more than any other if asked to label that person. Study 2 examined this issue.

## Method

A one paragraph description of a person with characteristics corresponding to high loadings for the four factors derived in Study 1a was developed:

This type of person is someone who acts conceited, even arrogant. When they are confronted, or have their views challenged, this type of person might say, “Do you know who I am?” This type of person feels they are entitled, or have a right, to insult or be disrespectful to other people (if they think the other person deserves it). This type of person is often irritating to others (and doesn’t care), would not feel guilty about “cutting in line” at a store or an event, and is generally insensitive to (or disregards) the feelings of others.

Two online panels of respondents were presented with this description and ask to identify the type of person described in the paragraph.

## Results

The first online panel ( $N = 353$ ) was asked, “In the space below type a single word or term that you believe best describes this person. Feel free to use either a vulgar or a non-vulgar word or term if you believe that vulgarity or non-vulgarity best summarizes the type of person described above.” The highest proportion of respondents (33.7%,  $n = 119$ ) stated the VE term. The second most frequent response was various terms indicating conceit (17.6%,  $n = 62$ ), followed by *douche* (8.8%,  $n = 31$ ), *jerk* (8.5%;  $n = 30$ ), *narcissist* (5.9%;  $n = 21$ ), and assorted alternative vulgarities (5.9%;  $n = 21$ ). Other words/terms (e.g., *antisocial*, *miserable*, *shallow*, *hateful*, *ex-[spouse]*) accounted for 19.5% ( $n = 69$ ) of the responses.

A second question was asked on the following screen: “Please select one of the following words or terms that you believe best summarizes the type of person described previously.” The alternatives presented were: *jerk*, *unpleasant*, *bitch*, *asshole*, *bastard*, *detestable*, and *obnoxious*. Most respondents selected VE (58.1%,  $n = 205$ ), followed by *jerk* (15.9%,  $n = 56$ ), *obnoxious* (15.3%,  $n = 54$ ), *unpleasant* (4.8%;  $n = 17$ ), *bitch* (2.8%;  $n = 10$ ), *detestable* (2.0%;  $n = 7$ ) and *bastard* (1.1%;  $n = 4$ ).

A second survey panel ( $N = 205$ ) was used to avoid answer prompting on a third question. Respondents were presented with the same descriptive

paragraph and asked: “Different words could be used to refer to the person described in the paragraph you just read. Would ‘asshole’ be one correct word to use in referring to this type of person? Or would ‘asshole’ not be one correct word to use in referring to this type of person?” Respondents were given two answer choices: “Yes, one correct word would be asshole” and “No, one correct word would not be asshole.” Out of  $N = 205$  respondents,  $n = 203$  (99.0%) answered “Yes.”

## **Discussion**

The results of questions 1 and 2 indicate the VE term is the one that most frequently comes to mind when people are presented with a description of someone using items reflective of the VE scale factors. The results of question 3 are not only consistent with the view that the paragraph derived from the factor analytic results describes a VE but that respondents have no hesitation in using that term in labeling someone. The results of Study 2 support the content validity of the scale items.

## **STUDY 3**

A third study evaluated nomological validity for the VE scale. Five scales were used that measure constructs hypothesized to be related to the VE.

## **Method**

### ***Procedure***

Two independent samples were utilized to examine the generalizability of the results. The first was a sample of  $N = 254$  respondents from an online panel. The second was a sample of  $N = 235$  undergraduate business students at a private southwestern university who participated in exchange for course credit. Respondents were told the study was on the development of scales and presented with a booklet containing five of them. Those scales measured, in order, social desirability bias, VE, self-esteem, sociotropy-autonomy, and psychological entitlement. Scores on the VE scale were correlated with the other four measures.

### ***Hypotheses***

The 33-item Marlowe-Crowne (1960) social desirability scale was employed. The VE is often unaware of how they appear to others (Nunberg, 2012), and may not be overly concerned when they are (James, 2012; Sutton, 2007), which suggests that “truthfully” presenting socially undesirable views would seem normal and even natural to a VE, given their sense of entitlement. A negative correlation was predicted.

The 10-item Rosenberg self-esteem scale (Rosenberg, 1965) was used. The Rosenberg scale is the most widely used and validated self-report measure of self-esteem (Robins, Hendin, and Trzesniewski, 2001; Gray-Little, Williams, and Hancock, 1997). Given the VE’s socially arrogant beliefs, scores on the VE scale might be expected to be significantly and positively correlated with scores on the Rosenberg measure. On the other hand, we suspect that VE behaviors, on some level, might serve as a mask for underlying feelings of insecurity or inferiority, resulting in a negative correlation. We hypothesize the latter and do so with consideration given to the principle that those who treat others poorly often do so because they do not feel good about themselves (Blaine and Crocker, 1993).

The 44-item sociotropy-autonomy scale (Bieling, Beck, and Brown, 2000) scale was employed. Sociotropy evaluates a person’s need for positive interchange with others and autonomy measures a need for self-direction and independence. Given the VE’s disrespect and disregard of others, a significant and negative correlation between VE scores and sociotropy was expected. Conversely, a positive correlation between VE scores and autonomy was expected.

Finally, a 9-item psychological entitlement scale was administered (Campbell et al., 2004). Given that entitlement is a major theoretical element of the VE construct being examined. VE scores were expected to be positively correlated with entitlement scores.

### **Results**

The correlation between the VE (online, student  $\alpha = .93, .89$ ) and Marlowe-Crowne social desirability scales is  $-.28$  and  $-.21$  (both  $p < .001$ ) for the online and student samples respectively, consistent with expectations. The VE correlation with the Rosenberg self-esteem scale is negative (and identical) for the online,  $r = -.19, p < .001$ , and student samples,  $r = -.19, p < .001$ , consistent with expectations.

VE scores are negatively related to sociotropy,  $r = -.31, p < .001$ ;  $r = -.26, p < .001$ , consistent with expectations. However, autonomy is not significantly correlated with VE scores,  $r = .06, p > .35$ ;  $r = .06, p > .45$ , inconsistent with expectations. An examination of the relationships between the VE and sociotropy-autonomy subscales reveals a negative correlation with fear of criticism and rejection,  $r = -.25, p < .001$ ;  $r = -.24$ , both  $p < .001$ , and preference for affiliation,  $r = -.28, p < .001$ ;  $r = -.21, p < .001$ . A positive correlation is seen with sensitivity to control by others,  $r = .31, p < .001$ ;  $r = .19, p < .003$ , and a non-significant negative correlation was obtained with independent goal attainment,  $r = -.10, p < .13$ ;  $r = -.10, p < .11$ . The final relationship examined was between VE scores and psychological entitlement. A positive correlation was found,  $r = .48, p < .001$ ;  $r = .44, p < .001$ , consistent with expectations.

## Discussion

Study 3 provides evidence of nomological validity through relationships with constructs hypothesized to be related to the VE. The results were consistent across two independent samples. The positive correlations between VE scores and entitlement, as well as the negative correlations with social desirability, self-esteem, and sociotropy were consistent with theoretical expectations across both samples.

## STUDY 4

Study 4 examines the relationship between the VE and the Dark Triad of personality traits: narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy (Paulhus and Williams, 2002; Furnham et al., 2013). The question addressed in Study 4 is whether the VE scale measures a construct that is distinct from the Dark Triad. In this and remaining studies, subclinical measures of narcissism and psychopathy are used in calculating Dark Triad scores. Subclinical maladies are distinguished from their clinical counterparts not in the qualitative nature of the problems represented but rather in the level, intensity or pervasiveness of those problems (LeBreton, Binning, and Adorno, 2006).

We contend that one important point of difference between the Dark Triad and the VE is that the former are traits reflective of a very broad base of cognitive and affective disturbances that are associated with impaired social

behaviors. The VE is more focused; it is a personality facet uniquely manifested in feelings of entitlement to treat others in an uncivil manner. Given the nature of the Dark Triad and VE, we expect they might possess a significant level of shared variation.—but that does not theoretically or statistically imply they measure the same thing. We contend they are different constructs and use latent modeling to test that hypothesis.

## Method

N=352 online respondents completed items comprising four scales: Machiavellianism, VE, narcissism, and psychopathy. The most common scales that measure the long-form components of the Dark Triad traits were utilized (Furnham et al., 2013). Narcissism was measured using the 40-item Narcissistic Personality Inventory (Raskin and Hall, 1979; Raskin and Terry, 1988). Machiavellianism was measured using the 20-item Mach IV (Christie and Geis, 1970). Psychopathy was measured using the 64-item Self-Report Psychopathy scale (SRP-III) (Paulhus, Hermphill, and Hare, 2012). The model tested is shown in Figure 1 with the standardized path estimates provided.

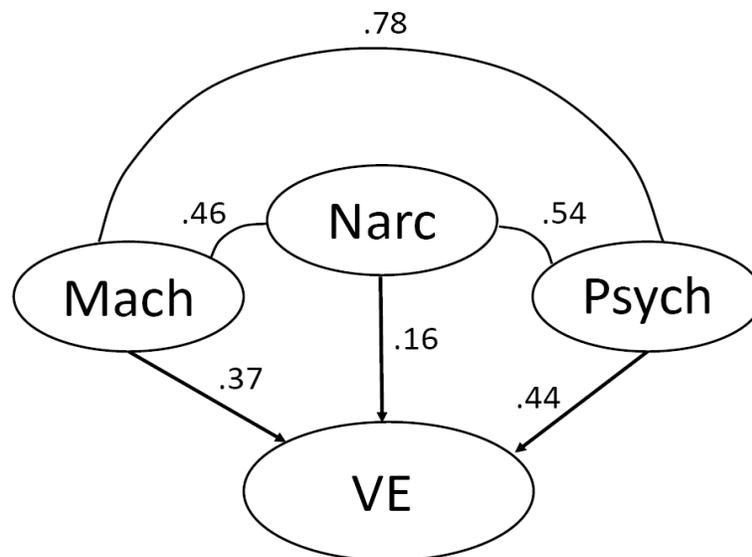


Figure 1. Latent model with standardized estimates for VE and Dark Triad (Machiavellianism, Narcissism, Psychopathy) measures.

## Results

The correlations between the VE scale and each of the components of the Dark Triad are moderate to high. VE correlated .62, .52, and .77 with Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy, respectively. In the latent model test, the three Dark Triad elements were allowed to intercorrelate and all of those relationships are significant ( $p < .0001$ ). Importantly, each of the paths from the Dark Triad to VE is also highly significant ( $p < .0001$ ), with the size of the coefficient for psychopathy being highest, followed by Machiavellianism and narcissism. Nevertheless, model results reveal that the VE is not adequately explained by the Dark Triad traits (Chi Square ( $X^2 = 13,370.6$ ,  $p < .0001$ )). Although RMSEA value of .06 suggests a moderate fit, the SRMR of .08 indicates a marginal one (Hu and Bentler, 1999). Further, the CFI value of .53 and the TLI value of .52 both indicate the model fits poorly (with .95 and above considered measures of a good fit; Hu and Bentler, 1999).

## Discussion

Our conclusion is that the VE is not a construct synonymous with the Dark Triad. The lack of an acceptable fit may be surprising to some given the size of the correlations between the VE and the Dark Triad traits. However, when squaring those correlations to obtain coefficients of determination, which yield the percent of variance shared in common, it is seen that only one of the Dark Triad traits (psychopathy) accounts for more than half (59.3%) of the variance in the VE. When one construct explains half, or even more than half, of the variation in another that fact in itself provides insufficient grounds to argue that the constructs converge or are basically “the same thing.” However, additional studies were conducted to provide evidence that the VE is distinct from the Dark Triad and has added explanatory value. Specifically, when controlling for the Dark Triad, does the VE provide a significant increase in understanding theoretical outcomes?

In Studies 5-7, we use two different short scale versions of the Dark Triad that have come to dominate research in the area (Furnham et al., 2013). We used both of them because there is little consensus as to which is more valid. The use of both should also have value in testing our view that the VE is a construct not synonymous with the Dark Triad. If the VE adds significantly to the prediction of outcomes one would expect the Dark Triad to explain, and

does so consistently across two alternative measures of the triad, it would support the suggestion that the VE is theoretically distinct.

## STUDY 5

Study 5 examines the Big Five personality model and the position of the Dark Triad and the VE on that measure. In terms of location in personality space, the two most consistent findings are that the Dark Triad correlates negatively with the agreeableness and conscientiousness subscales of the Big Five (e.g., Furnham et al., 2013; Jonason, Li, and Teicher, 2010; Jakobwitz and Egan, 2006). The theoretical view of the VE being offered makes no predictions about conscientiousness. It does, however, make a clear prediction regarding agreeableness. The VE is a highly “disagreeable” individual, at least on an interpersonal level, even more so, we contend, than someone with Dark Triad traits. This is because the VE, by its very definition, is someone who sees nothing wrong with being disagreeable because they feel entitled to be that way. Hence, they see no reason to mask their feelings or behavior. The items on the Big Five agreeableness subscale focus entirely on one’s relationship with others, which makes sense given that being agreeable requires another person to agree with. Since the VE is an interpersonal construct reflecting problems interacting with others, we expect the VE to add significant explanatory power to the prediction of agreeableness beyond what is accounted for by the Dark Triad.

### Method

The 44-item Big Five scale presented by Benet-Martinez and John (1998) was administered. As noted by Furnham et al. (2013), the two short measures that have come to dominate Dark Triad research are the 12-item Dirty Dozen (Jonason and Webster, 2010) and the 27-item Short Dark Triad (Jones and Paulhus 2014). Both of those Dark Triad measures were utilized, along with the VE scale. Online panel participants ( $N=297$ ) completed these four scales.

## Results and Discussion

Both the Dirty Dozen (DD, hereafter) and the Short Dark Triad (SD3, hereafter) scales were reliable ( $\alpha = .73$  for both). Each of the subscales for the Big Five was reliable: extraversion ( $\alpha = .89$ ), agreeableness ( $\alpha = .85$ ), conscientiousness ( $\alpha = .88$ ), neuroticism ( $\alpha = .91$ ), and openness ( $\alpha = .87$ ). The VE scale was also reliable ( $\alpha = .93$ ).

VE was fairly highly correlated with both Dark Triad measures. The correlation of VE with DD was .72; VE correlated .76 with SD3. Correlations of the Big Five dimensions with the two Dark Triad measures and the VE scale are presented in Table 4. Of particular interest is the stronger inverse relationship between agreeableness and VE than between agreeableness and either Dark Triad measure.

The hypothesis that VE would add incremental value to the prediction of agreeableness, relative to the Dark Triad, was tested using regression analyses. Separate regressions were conducted for the two Dark Triad measures. The SD3 was tested first. In step 1, the SD3 was entered and significantly predicted agreeableness,  $F(1, 288) = 47.67, R^2 = .14, p < .0001$ . In step 2, VE was entered and was found to significantly improve prediction,  $F(2, 287) = 101.48, R^2 = .41, p < .0001$ . The DD was tested next. In step 1, DD was found to significantly predict agreeableness,  $F(1, 288) = 90.36, R^2 = .24, p < .0001$ . In step 2, VE was added and significantly improved the prediction,  $F(2, 287) = 93.96, R^2 = .40, p < .0001$ .

**Table 4. Big Five Dimensions Correlations with Dark Triad and VE Measures<sup>1</sup>**  
(N=290)

Big Five Dimensions	SD3	DD	VE
Extraversion	.28	.10	.03
Agreeableness	-.38	-.49	-.63
Conscientiousness	-.19	-.36	-.33
Neuroticism	.03	.19	.21
Openness	.15	.05	-.11

<sup>1</sup> All correlations +/- .12 are significant at  $p < .05$ ;  $r = -.11, p < .06$ .

These results demonstrate that the VE construct adds significantly to the prediction of agreeableness beyond what is accounted for by the Dark Triad. In doing so, they support the suggestion that the VE scale measures a construct

different from the Dark Triad. The possibility that the VE scale might simply be a better (more predictive) version of the Dark Triad is neither consistent with latent model testing nor with the nature of the underlying dimensions of both scales. Rather, we believe the reason why the VE scale uniquely predicts variation in agreeableness is because despite being clearly related to the Dark Triad, the VE is a construct that in concept and meaning diverges from those measures.

## STUDY 6A

James (2012) suggests the VE trait is so fundamental to a person that they rarely change. Although this issue is debatable, another question is whether someone can experience an increase in VE beliefs due to situational influences. Can one become more similar to a VE under certain conditions? Study 6a examined this state versus trait question.

When people perceive others to be the cause of their misfortune, mistreatment, or lack of goal attainment, anger is often aroused (Keltner, Ellsworth, & Edwards, 1993; Berkowitz & Harmon-Jones, 2004). The potential problems with such a reaction are serious because anger is intimately associated with violence and general disruptiveness in social relations (Lipscomb et al., 2002; Anderson & Pearson, 1999). Although it seems clear that people who feel entitled to be uncivil to others can result in anger (James, 2012), another issue is whether anger causes an increase in VE tendencies. Confirming this relationship might have value, for example, to organizational managers, while also theoretically demonstrating the situational sensitivity of VE characteristics to certain emotions.

In Study 6a, we asked an online panel to get angry and afterwards tell us what they thought about in order to make themselves angry. Our general hypothesis is that anger in itself is sufficient to heighten VE scores. Anger causes people to strike out, with other individuals being convenient targets. We suspect that anger even at life events (e.g., “I just thought about the \$750,000 I lost in the stock market”; “I just thought about idiotic politicians”; “I tried to think about all the vile and disgusting people in the world”) will result in a significant increase in VE scores. From a biological perspective, anger served an adaptive evolutionary function (Averill 1983), with self-protection being one explanation. One consequence of this could be less concern about the rights of others, including the need to be civil.

We hypothesize, however, that those who state their anger is directly attributed to mistreatment or injustice by specific individuals will react most strongly and have the greatest increase in VE scores (e.g., “I had to deal with a very rude asshole”; “I thought about the time a co-worker did not fess up to her wrong and got a pay raise and a promotion instead of me”; “I thought about how my ex just dumped me for no reason”). Anger resulting from personal violation at the hands of another should be most keenly felt and arouse the greatest uncivil retaliatory response (Alfred, 2000).

## Method

Respondents were  $N=238$  people from an online survey panel. Test group ( $n=126$ ) respondents were first exposed to the following instructions:

This is a study on anger and how it affects people. We need you to “get mad” for this study. We need you to honestly get as mad as you can. You can get angry anyway you want but one way to get mad is to think about someone or something in life that wasn’t fair to you, or even hurt you. Regardless of how you do it, we need you to get as angry as you can. Once you are really mad turn the page and answer the questions.

A control group of  $n = 112$  respondents did not receive the anger instructions. Both groups answered the VE scale questions, followed by four items to measure anger. Using five-point strongly agree to strongly disagree response categories, the items asked, “At this moment I feel” angry, enraged, mad, and furious. The general anger hypothesis was tested using a one-factor (anger versus control) between-subjects design.

In the anger condition, people were asked (after completion of the anger items) to state how they got angry: “We asked you to get angry for this study. Please tell us how you did it. What did you think about in order to get mad? Please tell us the thoughts or memories that went through your head as you got angry.” The answers were coded into two categories: anger due to personal mistreatment ( $n = 60$ ) and anger due to other causes ( $n = 66$ ). The source of anger hypothesis was also tested using a one-factor (anger due to personal mistreatment versus anger due to other causes versus control) between-subjects design.

## Results

The four anger items reliably measured the same underlying construct ( $\alpha = .90$ ) and were summed to form an index. The instructions successfully manipulated anger between the anger and control conditions,  $F(1, 235) = 32.55, p < .0001$  ( $M = 12.7, SD = 4.3$  vs.  $M = 9.9, SD = 3.1$ ). When people were asked to get angry they were able to do so. A significant difference between conditions on VE scores ( $\alpha = .94$ ) was also found,  $F(1, 235) = 16.02, p < .0001$  ( $M = 63.3, SD = 17.9$  vs.  $M = 54.8, SD = 16.3$ ). The hypothesis that anger, in general, would result in an increase in VE scores was supported. What is most telling is that in the control condition, when people were not asked to make themselves angry, the correlation between the anger index and the total VE score was  $.09$  ( $p > .22$ ). However, when respondents were asked to make themselves angry, the correlation between the anger index and VE scores was  $.63$  ( $p < .0001$ ). These results indicate that the conscious experience of anger and VE tendencies are clearly related.

We next examined whether anger due to personal mistreatment results in higher VE scores. In doing so, we first looked at whether anger in the personal mistreatment group was greater than in comparison groups. A significant effect was found for the anger index,  $F(2, 234) = 25.18, p < .0001$ . Anger scores were higher for the personally mistreated group ( $M = 14.1, SD = 3.5$ ), followed by anger due to other causes ( $M = 11.4, SD = 4.6$ ), followed by the control group. Using critical value adjustments based on the Bonferroni procedure (Rosenthal and Rubin 1984), all three means were significantly different (smallest  $t = 2.63, p < .01$ ). The hypothesis was then tested. ANOVA results for VE scores were significant,  $F(2, 234) = 9.77, p < .0001$ . Anger due to personal mistreatment resulted in the highest VE mean ( $M = 66.6, SD = 17.0$ ), followed by anger due to other causes ( $M = 60.4, SD = 18.4$ ), followed by the control group. All three means were found to be significantly different (smallest  $t = 2.09, p < .05$ , one-tailed). However, the correlation between VE scores and anger due to personal mistreatment group was  $.55$ , whereas the correlation with anger due to other causes was  $.67$ . The difference between these correlations was non-significant ( $p = .29$ ).

## Discussion

The results of Study 6a indicate that simply reflecting on uncivil treatment by others causes anger. And when people get angry feelings of entitled

incivility towards others increase, i.e., there is an increase in VE scores. Hence, one possibility is that the spread of incivility in organizations or social relations could result from interacting with VEs. We suspect that the relationship between anger and VE tendencies is reciprocal: Uncivil treatment results in anger, which results in an increase in VE tendencies, which results in uncivil treatment of others.

These results also address the state versus trait issue. Regardless of whether the VE trait can be changed in a person, it does appear that a feeling state of entitled incivility can be temporarily aroused. We suspect most people have behaved similar to a VE at some point in their lives, if only for a short while. The Study 5 findings suggest that anger, at some level, may have been involved. We also suspect that the lack of a difference in correlations between anger and VE scores for the personal versus non-personal reasons causes indicates that once past a given level of anger intensity, the relationship between the cause of anger and VE tendencies breaks down.

Although this study demonstrated the importance of anger in arousal of VE dispositions, another question is whether it plays a greater role in the Dark Triad. Hall et al. (2004) suggests that anger relates to the lifestyle factor of psychopathy. The association between narcissism, anger and hostility is also known (Raskin and Hall, 1979; Raskin, Novacek, and Hogan, 1991).

It was predicted in Study 6b that the VE would contribute significantly to predicting anger beyond the explanation provided by the Dark Triad. We contend that the VE perceives anger as another means of entitling their incivility towards others. Whereas most people would view anger as an emotion whose manifestations should be publically constrained, the VE interprets that state as another justification for treating others poorly. Anger and entitled incivility are intimately intertwined in the VE. On the other hand, depending on the context, anger might not match the mindset of a narcissist, psychopath (for exceptions to this view see Raskin and Hall, 1979 and Hall et al., 2004), or Machiavellian. For example, anger might interfere with the Machiavellian's strategic manipulation of others for personal gain, as well as the narcissistic or psychopathic pursuit of an objective. We hypothesize that anger will be uniquely predicted by VE scores after controlling for the Dark Triad.

## STUDY 6B

### Method

The same anger inducement instructions were used as in Study 6a. University students ( $n = 151$ ) served as volunteers in the study. An additional  $n = 248$  respondents from an online pool also participated. As in Study 3, the results were the same for both the student and non-student samples. The hypothesis tests were conducted using the full  $N = 399$  respondents. Given the equivalent correlations of anger with VE scores for personal mistreatment versus non-personal reasons, respondents were not asked what made them angry. The control (non-anger) condition was also not used. Respondents completed the anger index, followed by the DD and SD3 and VE scales.

### Results and Discussion

All of the indices examined were reliable: anger ( $\alpha = .92$ ), VE= ( $\alpha = .92$ ), DD ( $\alpha = .72$ ), SD3 ( $\alpha = .74$ ). The correlations of VE, DD and SD3 with the anger index were respectively as follows: .45, .25 and .22. VE correlated .69 with the DD and .74 with the SD3.

First, we examined whether VE added explanatory power to the prediction of anger relative to the DD. In step 1, the DD significantly predicted anger,  $F(1, 386) = 78.63, R^2 = .17, p < .0001$ . In step 2, VE was added and found to significantly increase the prediction of anger,  $F(2, 385) = 91.24, R^2 = .32, p < .0001$ .

Next, we examined whether VE added explanatory power to the prediction of anger relative to SD3. In step 1, SD3 significantly predicted anger,  $F(1, 387) = 63.32, R^2 = .14, p < .0001$ . In step 2, VE was entered and resulted in a significant increase in predictability,  $F(2, 386) = 94.21, R^2 = .33, p < .0001$ . These results indicate that the VE uniquely contributes to the explanation of anger in a manner not accounted for by the Dark Triad. These results strike us as important given the past emphasis on the Dark Triad in understanding problems thought to involve interpersonal anger or resentment, such as conflicts at work (Spain, Harms, and LeBreton 2013). Study 7 examined the role of the VE and Dark Triad in work related problems more closely.

## STUDY 7

A final study examined whether the VE has incremental value, relative to the Dark Triad, in predicting work related problems. Workplace deviance on the part of employees is an expensive matter that organizations frequently address (Bennett and Robinson, 2000). The Dark Triad has been cited as playing a major role in many of those problems (Spain, Harms, and LeBreton, 2013; O'Boyle, Forsyth, Banks, and McDaniel, 2012), one important classification of which is counterproductive work behaviors (CWB, hereafter). Although the range of such behaviors is quite broad (Spain, Harms, and LeBreton, 2013), this study will focus on employee problems, supervisor relations, and deviant behavior. These CWB areas were selected because they reflect incivility towards others or behaviors arguably motivated by resentments towards a place of work and the people who work there. Hence, for reasons previously discussed, it was hypothesized that VE scores would add significantly to the prediction of CWB beyond what is accounted for by the Dark Triad.

### Method

A battery of 38 items was obtained from prior literature on CWB. Five items measuring supervisor neglect/abuse were obtained from Jones (2009). Thirty-three items with subscales reflecting sabotage, withdrawal, production deviance, theft, and general abuse were obtained from Spector et al. (2006). The items tested, and their associated dimensions, are provided in Table 5. These items, along with the SD3, DD and VE measures were administered to a sample of  $N=308$  online panel respondents.

### Results

Reliability was high across all scales: SD3 ( $\alpha = .80$ ), DD ( $\alpha = .73$ ), VE ( $\alpha = .94$ ), supervisor abuse/neglect ( $\alpha = .87$ ), sabotage ( $\alpha = .81$ ), withdrawal ( $\alpha = .82$ ), production deviance ( $\alpha = .81$ ), theft ( $\alpha = .90$ ), and general abuse ( $\alpha = .95$ ). The correlations between the CWB indices and VE, DD and SD3 are provided in Table 6. VE correlated .80 with DD and .78 with SD3.

The analyses involved a series of regressions. We regressed SD3, DD and VE on each of the CWB indices. We started with supervisor abuse/neglect. In

step 1, SD3 was entered and significantly predicted supervisor abuse/neglect,  $F(1, 305) = 84.99, R^2 = .22, p < .0001$ . In step 2, VE was entered and significantly increased predictability,  $F(2, 304) = 58.78, R^2 = .28, p < .0001$ . Next, DD was entered in step 1 and significantly predicted supervisor abuse/neglect,  $F(1, 305) = 81.88, R^2 = .21, p < .0001$ . In step 2, VE was entered and found to significantly improve predictability,  $F(2, 304) = 57.71, R^2 = .28, p < .0001$ .

**Table 5. Counterproductive Work Behaviors and Dimensions**

Item	Dimension
Purposely wasted your employer's materials/supplies	Sabotage
Purposely damaged a piece of equipment or property	Sabotage
Purposely dirtied or littered your place of work	Sabotage
Came to work late without permission	Withdrawal
Stayed home from work and said you were sick when you were not	Withdrawal
Taken a longer break than you were allowed to take	Withdrawal
Left work earlier than you were allowed to	Withdrawal
Purposely did your work incorrectly	Production deviance
Purposely worked slowly when things needed to get done	Production deviance
Purposely failed to follow instructions	Production deviance
Stolen something belonging to your employer	Theft
Took supplies or tools home without permission	Theft
Put in to be paid for more hours than you worked	Theft
Took money from your employer without permission	Theft
Stole something belonging to someone at work	Theft
Told people outside the job what a lousy place you work for	General abuse
Started or continued a damaging or harmful rumor at work	General abuse
Been nasty or rude to a client or customer	General abuse
Insulted someone about their job performance	General abuse
Made fun of someone's personal life	General abuse
Ignored someone at work	General abuse
Blamed someone at work for an error you made	General abuse
Started an argument with someone at work	General abuse
Verbally abused someone at work	General abuse
Made an obscene gesture (the finger) to someone at work	General abuse
Threatened someone at work with violence	General abuse
Threatened someone at work, but not physically	General abuse
Said something obscene to someone at work to make them feel bad	General abuse
Did something to make someone at work look bad	General abuse
Played a mean prank to embarrass someone at work	General abuse
Looked at someone at work's private mail/property without permission	General abuse
Hit or pushed someone at work	General abuse
Insulted or made fun of someone at work	General abuse
Purposely neglected to follow your immediate supervisor's instructions	Supervisor Abuse/Neglect
Acted rudely toward your immediate supervisor	Supervisor Abuse/Neglect
Spread unconfirmed rumors about your immediate supervisor	Supervisor Abuse/Neglect
Did something to get your immediate supervisor in trouble	Supervisor Abuse/Neglect
Encouraged your coworkers to get back at your immediate supervisor	Supervisor Abuse/Neglect

**Table 6. CWB Correlations with Dark Triad and VE Scales<sup>1</sup>**

CWB	VE	DD	SD3
<b>Sabotage</b>	.45	.42	.40
<b>Withdrawal</b>	.34	.31	.31
<b>Production Deviance</b>	.43	.41	.38
<b>Theft</b>	.40	.39	.35
<b>General Abuse</b>	.52	.48	.46
<b>Supervisor Abuse/Neglect</b>	.52	.46	.47

<sup>1</sup> All correlations are significant at  $p < .0001$

The next regressions involved sabotage. In step 1, SD3 was entered and was found to be a significant predictor,  $F(1, 304) = 58.97, R^2 = .16, p < .0001$ . In step 2, VE was entered and significantly increased predictability,  $F(2, 303) = 39.60, R^2 = .20, p < .0001$ . When DD was entered in step 1 it significantly predicted sabotage,  $F(1, 304) = 63.77, R^2 = .17, p < .0001$ . In step 2, VE was entered and significantly increased predictability,  $F(2, 303) = 40.22, R^2 = .21, p < .0001$ .

Regressions were made on withdrawal. In step 1, SD3 was entered and was a significant predictor,  $F(1, 304) = 31.84, R^2 = .09, p < .0001$ . In step 2, VE was entered and significantly increased predictability,  $F(2, 303) = 20.87, R^2 = .12, p < .0001$ . Next, withdrawal was regressed in DD in step 1 and a significant effect was obtained,  $F(1, 304) = 31.08, R^2 = .09, p < .0001$ . In step 2, VE was entered and significantly increased predictability,  $F(2, 303) = 20.58, R^2 = .12, p < .0001$ .

Regressions were made on production deviance. In step 1, SD3 was a significant predictor,  $F(1, 304) = 51.14, R^2 = .14, p < .0001$ . In step 2, VE was entered and significantly improved predictability,  $F(2, 303) = 35.93, R^2 = .19, p < .0001$ . Next, DD was regressed on production deviance in step 1 and was a significant predictor,  $F(1, 304) = 61.61, R^2 = .17, p < .0001$ . In step 2, VE was entered and significantly improved predictability,  $F(2, 303) = 37.68, R^2 = .20, p < .0001$ .

The next CWB index examined was theft. In step 1, SD3 was found to be a significant predictor,  $F(1, 304) = 43.57, R^2 = .12, p < .0001$ . VE was entered in step 2 and significantly improved predictability,  $F(2, 303) = 29.79, R^2 = .17, p < .0001$ . When theft was regressed on DD in step 1 a significant effect was obtained,  $F(1, 304) = 53.06, R^2 = .15, p < .0001$ . In step 2, VE was entered and found to significantly increase predictability,  $F(2, 303) = 31.51, R^2 = .17, p < .0001$ .

The last CWB examined was general abuse. In step 1, SD3 was entered and found to be a significant predictor,  $F(1, 304) = 81.50, R^2 = .21, p < .0001$ . In step 2, VE was entered and found to significantly improve predictability,  $F(2, 303) = 57.72, R^2 = .28, p < .0001$ . Next, DD was regressed on general abuse in step 1 and was a significant predictor,  $F(1, 304) = 90.61, R^2 = .23, p < .0001$ . In step 2, VE was entered and again improved predictability,  $F(2, 303) = 58.99, R^2 = .28, p < .0001$ .

## Discussion

The results of Study 7 have value in that the most consistent personality based explanation for counterproductive work place behaviors offered in the literature, to this date, has been the Dark Triad. In their review of the Dark Triad literature, Furnham et al.(2013) state, “One or more of the Dark Triad personalities invariably emerge in analyses of counterproductive [work] behavior” (p.206). The VE scale was found in Study 7 to add significantly to the predictability, i.e., understanding, of work related problems across six dimensions after controlling for the Dark Triad. The data again suggest that the VE has unique predictive value relative to the Dark Triad.

## SUPPLEMENTAL ANALYSES

### Dimensional Relationships

An issue not yet examined is the relationship between the underlying dimensions of the VE and Dark Triad measures. Table 7 provides correlations between the VE scale and the three components of the Dark Triad across the SDT and DD scales. Across studies and measures, the strongest correlations are observed for psychopathy, consistent with latent model testing in Study 4. We suspect this finding is likely due to the lack of empathy for the feelings of others manifested in psychopathy, which is also inherent in the VE. The average variance shared, on the basis of those six correlations, between VE and psychopathy was  $r^2 = .55$ , followed by Machiavellianism ( $r^2 = .40$ ) and narcissism ( $r^2 = .19$ ).

**Table 7. VE Correlations with Components of the Dark Triad\***

		NARCISSISM	MACHIAVELLIANISM	PSYCHOPATHY
STUDY 5 (N = 290)	SDT	.37	.65	.81
	DD	.45	.58	.72
STUDY 6b (N = 394)	STD	.41	.65	.71
	DD	.38	.61	.64
STUDY 7 (N = 308)	SDT	.47	.61	.80
	DD	.54	.66	.74

\*Cell entries are correlations between VE scale scores and scores on components of the Dark Triad as measured by the Short Dark Triad (SDT) and Dirty Dozen (DD) scales. All correlations are significant at  $p < .00001$ .

An additional analysis was performed examining the correlations between the two Dark Triad measures and the four underlying VE dimensions. Dimensional scores were calculated by summing the scores for scale items that loaded highly on a dimension (see Table 2). The findings are shown in Table 8. As seen, consistently across studies and measures, the strongest correlations are found for social arrogance. The average variance shared, on the basis of those six correlations, between the Dark Triad and VE dimensions was  $r^2 = .55$  for social arrogance, followed by  $r^2 = .41$  for disrespect,  $r^2 = .37$  for self-enthronement, and  $r^2 = .35$  for insensitivity.

**Table 8. Dark Triad Correlations with VE Dimensions\***

		Social Arrogance	Disrespect	Self-Enthronement	Insensitivity
STUDY 5 (N = 290)	SDT	.73	.66	.65	.51
	DD	.71	.64	.51	.60
STUDY 6b (N = 388)	STD	.75	.60	.64	.53
	DD	.68	.56	.54	.63
STUDY 7 (N = 308)	SDT	.78	.67	.66	.61
	DD	.79	.68	.65	.64

\*Cell entries are correlations between VE dimension scores and scores on the Dark Triad as measured by the Short Dark Triad (SDT) and Dirty Dozen (DD) scales. All correlations are significant at  $p < .00001$ .

In Study 5, agreeableness was most strongly and inversely correlated with the insensitivity dimension of the VE ( $r = -.71$ ), followed by disrespect ( $r = -.63$ ), social arrogance ( $r = -.50$ ) and self-enthronement ( $r = -.41$ ). In Study 6b, anger was almost equivalently correlated with disrespect ( $r = .52$ ) and social arrogance ( $r = .51$ ), followed by self-enthronement ( $r = .48$ ) and insensitivity

( $r = .46$ ). In Study 7, all six counterproductive work behavior dimensions were most strongly correlated with social arrogance (correlation range = .55 to .33), followed (in most cases) by insensitivity (correlation range = .39 to .32). All of the correlations reported here are highly significant ( $p < .00001$ ).

## Demographics

Data were collected on respondent gender, age, marital status, employment status, and income level across studies. The data were aggregated ( $N = 1857$ ). ANOVAs were conducted on VE scores as a function of demographics. Critical value adjustments were again made (Rosenthal and Rubin 1984) when performing multiple comparisons.

A significant difference was found for gender,  $F(1, 1847) = 146.8, p < .0001$ , with the male mean ( $M = 56.5, SD = 15.4, n = 973$ ) being higher than the female ( $M = 48.0, SD = 14.8, n = 876$ ). A significant effect of age was found,  $F(1, 1847) = 11.59, p < .001$ , with a decreasing trend across increasing age groups: 18-25 ( $M = 54.8, SD = 16.1, n = 410$ ), 26-30 ( $M = 53.3, SD = 14.9, n = 411$ ), 31-39 ( $M = 53.4, SD = 16.7, n = 497$ ), and 40-70 ( $M = 49.3, SD = 14.5, n = 533$ ), with the oldest group scoring significantly lower than all others on the VE scale (smallest  $t = 3.96, p < .01$ ). A significant effect of marital status was found,  $F(1, 1829) = 4.54, p < .01$ . Single respondents scored significantly higher ( $M = 53.7, SD = 15.6, n = 942$ ) than either married ( $M = 51.5, SD = 15.6, n = 716$ ) or divorced/separated respondents ( $M = 51.2, SD = 16.0, n = 174$ ) (smallest  $t = 2.11, p < .05$ , one-tailed).

People who stated they were employed scored significantly higher on the VE scale,  $F(1, 1847) = 6.47, p < .01$  ( $M = 53.0, SD = 15.9, n = 1383$ ), than those who reported being unemployed ( $M = 50.9, SD = 15.0, n = 466$ ). Respondents who reported being employed were asked, "Are you happy with your job?" and provided with a dichotomous answer option: yes or no. Those who answered "no" ( $M = 56.0, SD = 15.4, n = 352$ ) scored significantly higher,  $F(1, 1397) = 16.25, p < .0001$ , than those who answered "yes" ( $M = 52.1, SD = 16.0, n = 1047$ ). No effect of income was found on VE scores.

## GENERAL DISCUSSION

A psychosocial concept is one that refers to a person's psychological development and outcomes as they relate to social interactions (Erickson,

1959). The results of these studies suggest that the VE, as an individual trait and state, is a product of such processes. Those same processes, and what they teach us about social appropriateness, may also help explain why the VE has been largely overlooked in formal research investigations. The VE, as a category of social existence, has arguably been empirically and theoretically ignored because the vulgar expression itself, and the associations people make with that term, are objectionable and offensive. We do not believe, however, those are good reasons to neglect a human condition with significant social and interpersonal consequences.

There is a reason why, beyond giving insult, the VE term is so widely used in North American society. We contend that reason is because the VE term represents and summarizes a meaning not conveyed by any other single term. Further, these studies support the position that as a measurable construct the VE has utility in understanding problem behaviors.

One contribution of this work is the specification and confirmation of the dimensions underlying VE behavior—social arrogance, disrespect, self-enthronement and insensitivity— and finding those traits to be interrelated (correlated). Those dimensions appear to be basic to the psychological constitution of a VE. Nevertheless, the scale examined here was developed through literature reviews, theory, and respondent feedback. We acknowledge that other perspectives on VEs exist. For example, the VE term is often used by law enforcement (and military) personnel to refer to adversaries with whom they must deal (Van Maanen, 1978). That particular usage may not fit the construct examined in these studies. Further, the possibility that the dimensional structure presented here may vary across contexts is an area for future research.

Four of the studies reported here focused on differentiating the VE from the Dark Triad. The inadequacy of the Dark Triad in statistically accounting for the VE (Study 4) was important and was extended by the results of Studies 5-7. Those studies showed that the VE uniquely predicted theoretical outcomes after controlling for the Dark Triad. Hence, the VE scale arguably measures a construct that is distinctive relative to the Dark Triad.

In reviewing the Dark Triad literature, Furnham et al. (2013) cite 10 different studies that have found the Dark Triad to be most strongly positioned on the agreeableness dimension of the Big Five. In Study 5, when controlling for alternative measures of the Dark Triad, the VE significantly improved the predictability of agreeableness. We argue that the reason for this finding is because the VE is exclusively an interpersonal problem complex, unlike the Dark Triad.

In Studies 6a and 6b, the results support the theoretical suspicion that anger may underlie VE related behaviors. In Study 6b, the findings demonstrated that when controlling for alternative measures of the Dark Triad, the VE added significantly to the prediction of anger. Those results appear to have utility because of anger's role in relationship problems, professional and personal, as seen in Study 6a. By understanding that anger and VE expressions are intertwined, if not (we suspect) mutually dependent, a greater appreciation for the source of, and factors involved in, social problems may result.

Working with someone who feels entitled to treat other people in an uncivil manner is not a promising prospect and that fact has been noted by James (2012), Sutton (2007) and Nunberg (2012). Much has been written about the explanatory power of Dark Triad personalities in accounting for work related problems (Furnham et al., 2013; O'Boyle et al, 2012). In Study 7, when controlling for alternative measures of the Dark Triad, the VE significantly improved the predictability of all of the CWB dimensions examined. An improved ability to predict conflict at work is clearly in need given the number of problems reported (Anderson and Pearson, 1999). Since VE scores were found (in the demographic analyses) to be higher for those employed than not unemployed and higher for those unhappy with their job, the VE scale might contribute to identifying potential problems before they occur.

One conclusion we draw from the studies reported here is that in addition to the three generally recognized "bad" character traits (narcissists, Machiavellians, and psychopaths), VEs may be another that requires recognition. We suspect, however, some might still argue the VE scale is little more than an alternative measure of the Dark Triad given the size of the correlations between the VE and Dark Triad measures. We do not believe that argument is a credible one.

Across studies, the mean square of the correlations between the VE and Dark Triad was .56. The Dark Triad component most strongly correlated with the VE scale was psychopathy; the average squared correlation was .55. To suggest that measures which share slightly more than half of their variance in common reflect the same construct is, we believe, simply wrong. Further, consider the pattern of correlations presented in Table 4 between the VE and Big Five measures. Those correlations contrast with research findings on the psychopathy component of the Dark Triad. Paulhus and Williams (2002) found psychopathy to be significantly and positively correlated with extraversion and openness, whereas a zero correlation with the former and a marginally significant negative correlation with the latter dimension were

found for the VE. Those researchers also found a significant negative correlation of psychopathy with neuroticism, whereas a significant positive correlation with that dimension was obtained for the VE. Further, the VE does not need to be removed from society given the nature of their relatively minor offenses. Such is often not the case with the psychopath, including the subclinical variety. We believe the theoretical and conceptual differences between the VE and the psychopath are not a matter of degree but of kind. The VE is not a psychopath, although they appear to share aspects of their belief systems.

Although the VE and Dark Triad were (as expected) related, the measures still behaved different. The VE added significantly and consistently to understanding issues theoretically and historically explained by the Dark Triad. In short, the VE outperformed the Dark Triad. The VE is unique because membership is permitted to those, and only to those, who believe they have the right to treat others, especially “me,” in an unfair, disrespectful, insensitive, and otherwise poor manner. And these are also the reasons why, we believe, the VE had added predictive value and was more highly correlated with the outcomes examined in Studies 5-7 than the broad constellation of traits represented by the Dark Triad and its elements.

Future research on the VE is essential. The importance of anger in explaining VE behavior needs to be explored more fully. For example, a formal test of the hypothesis that anger not only causes VE behavior but that behavior, in turn, causes incivility in others would make be a significant contribution to theoretical development. Those results would address the question of whether an encounter with a VE provides people with a perceived justification for behaving in a similar manner, which would have obvious implications for organizational hiring.

Another research possibility is to further examine the relationship between the VE and psychopath. In these studies, psychopathy was the only Dark Triad component that accounted for more than half of the variance in VE scores. Again, in our view the VE is not a psychopath, although we suspect many people might label a psychopath a VE upon first meeting them. One reason for such a misclassification occurring could be the lack of empathy for others that is shared by both conditions. An additional possibility is social arrogance. Social arrogance was the VE dimension related most strongly to the Dark Triad. Studies that examine the similarities and differences between the VE and psychopath might be a rich area for future research.

Other research could examine the professions in which VE characteristics have utility. From a social evolutionary perspective, we suspect VE traits have

survival value— and that value is more advantageous in some lines of work than in others. In the course of our studies one of the most common statements we heard was, “My boss is such a VE.” Is it true that supervisors possess VE traits to be greater degree than those lower on an organizational chart? Or rather is it true that within certain contexts most people can exhibit VE traits? This is another area likely to be rich with future research potential. In general, however, what is needed are empirical investigations that help to more fully integrate the VE construct within the larger body of theoretical and applied literature on personality problems and disorders.

A final issue is whether the act of labeling someone a VE, a sign of disrespect, if not self-enthronement, suggests that the labeler also possesses that trait. James (2012) argues that the answer to this question is “no.” He contends the issue of VE labeling to be a moral claim of when entitlement exceeds reasonable justification. We believe labeling someone a VE might actually be more preferred than being labeled a member of the Dark Triad or one of its components.

We suspect that the acceptance and use of the VE scale as a psychometric tool will likely depend on researchers and practitioners focusing on the meaning and utility of the VE construct, and not obsessing on the vulgarity itself. In the end, understanding the VE is important not only because they live and work among us— but also because sometimes they are us. By understanding entitled incivility, we may come to better understand ourselves.

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